

WITCHCRAFT

In New England,

By

MABEL LOOMIS TODD
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Witchcraft in New England

AS a child spending summers in Hampton, New Hampshire, I became intensely interested in the legends and stories connected with the old Moulton house. The story that the General had sold his soul to the devil for a large bootful of gold was strangely fascinating to me, scarcely less so the story that the canny gentleman had cut the sole from his boot, and the innocent devil continued to pour in the precious metal until the room was full.

Shortly after the death of his first wife he married again, a young woman of simpler family, who used to feel ghostly fingers on her wedding ring during the night. The story is told by Whittier in "The New Wife and the Old." When he died, the story goes that instead of a corpse in his coffin, it was found to be full of gold, or stones as some used to aver. At all events, a strange black cat leaped out of the window shortly after his death, and his body disappeared.

Years afterward Col. Oliver Whipple bought the house, bringing his slaves and his chariot from Rhode Island with Pomp and Dick in a rumble behind, holding the tassels. His arrival caused a great celebration, and lunch was served to all the surrounding country; but the family could never rest quietly in this haunted house. In the words of an old nurse for many years employed by them, she often heard the General's cane "thump, thumping down the stairs, his wife's lute-string dress a-rustling." At last three elderly clergymen were invited to the house, who stood at the foot of the stairs and begged these uncanny inhabitants to leave the house in peace. No ghostly sounds are reported after that.

Hampton witchcraft was rife before that of Salem. In 1673, Goody Cole was buried at the crossroads with a stake through her body:

"They buried them deep, but they wouldn't lie still,
For cats and witches are hard to kill."

Who does not remember the strange shivers running over him when first seeing the witch scene in Macbeth, typical witches,

"those grey old wives," bent and brown and shriveled, nose and chin grewsomely meeting, wild white locks straggling over their burning eyes as they leaned above the stewing toads and snakes in their dreadful brew.

"Double, double toil and trouble,
Fire burn; and cauldron bubble."

I can see it now, as the genius of Shakespeare brought it before us, and splendid Charlotte Cushman, old but glorious, as she vivified the play, and gave her pregnant interpretation. The witches' croon has always fascinated me, and a study of that strange belief in them, as old as time.

The witchcraft delusion and persecution is one of the saddest passages in our history, when men had so recently come to escape persecution, and so soon began to practice it. There was much intolerance in religious matters, as evidenced among other things by the cruelty to Quakers. By the time of the great witchcraft outburst in 1692, Quakers had been placed more on an equality with other sects, and actual persecution had ceased; but even later many of them complained bitterly of the treatment they received, and the unkind attitude of those who should have been friendly.

Many persons think that the greatest development of the twentieth century will not be so much in mechanical things as along psychological lines. Personal magnetism and telepathy are investigated, mesmerism, mental healing and hypnotism. Psychical societies are looking into all mysteries; the occultism of India and Japan are studied, and books which bring in, never so little, communication with the dead, or unusual power of divination or influence, are sure to sell. It is the great underlying, but burning, present interest. The borderland of two worlds is limitlessly attractive; all have lost some friend, all long to know. We are not as ignorant now as four or five centuries ago, and are not in such terror of supernatural influence. We know more of natural laws, but mysteries continue to attract.

It is hardly to be wondered at that the newness of natural phenomena and their unexplainable character should have inspired fear in early times. One has only to study the history of astronomy to see the tremendous hold such beliefs of uncanny influence had upon the ancients.

Comets brought evil by the shaking of their "horrid hair." Eclipses presaged disaster. Even Kepler was a zealous advocate of astrology, while Tycho Brahe kept a mumbling idiot about him as mediator and interpreter for higher powers. It is even asserted by a recent writer in *The Century* that four-fifths of humanity today believe in witchcraft.

One of the most absorbingly interesting studies is to trace the history of preternatural beliefs from the twilight of fear and tradition to present day sunlight,—a sunlight, however, which sane and open and bright and normal as it is, still holds the possibility of belief in that which cannot be explained by natural law, the germ of other-worldliness. A certain sort of spiritism, magic in various forms, sorcery, necromancy, enchantments, fetichism, witchcraft—all have had their day and power, their nations peculiarly susceptible, their victims.

Numa, an early Roman law giver, caused the people to believe that he had access to a divinity who told him what to do.

Pliny tells us of a Roman farmer, *Furius Cresinus*, who was accused of magic because he was uniformly successful. In reply he merely showed his better plows and other implements, and pointed to his sunburned daughters—his only witchcraft.

Zoroaster was also accused of magic, probably and simply because he had peculiar and unusual acquirements.

Others pretended to superior powers—which being regarded with awe, necessarily kept the people in a state of submissive fear. They called themselves variously—soothsayers, diviners, sorcerers, astrologers and oracles.

They were chiefly persons who had discovered some secret of nature, and instead of proclaiming it as now is done, held it in reserve as a secret power to be used upon the credulous.

Naturally they became priests. In this class are Chaldean priests of Assyria, Brahmins of India, Magi of Persia, Oracles of Greece, Augurs of Italy, Druids of Britain, Powwows (medicine men) of Indians.

Their procedure was more in the line of mysteries, charms, and the like, than actual witchcraft.

The Witch of Endor (*Samuel I*, Ch. 28) was probably an imposter, but the story is most interesting.

• The anonymous authors of Old Testament books, as in this chap-

ter, dating to 1000 B. C., were fond of putting laws, commands, sentiments for greater force, into the mouths of long-dead prophets and seers.

In those far-away Biblical days the laws against witchcraft were profoundly stringent (Deut. XVIII, 9-14), uncanny practices being pronounced "an abomination unto the Lord."

It was even commanded (Deut. XVII, 5) "Thou shalt stone them with stones till they die."

Two witnesses were required to be sure, but in that cruel fashion "So thou shalt put the evil away from among you," (Isaiah VIII, 19).

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," (Exodus XXII, 18): Literally, "Thou shalt not keep alive one who uses charms" (or spells).

Leviticus XIX, 26: "Neither shall you use enchantments or deal in soothsaying."

Leviticus XIX, 31: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards."

Leviticus XX, 27: "A man also or woman that has a familiar spirit or that is a wizard shall surely be put to death; thou shalt stone them with stones."

Taking all these Hebrew denunciations in their most cruel and literal meaning, they proceeded to carry out provisions which seem to us worse than barbarous in atrocity.

Demonology, as a general word, means an entire class of ideas relating to supernatural interference in mundane things, and was not originally necessarily applicable to evil spirits. Such intercommunication was at first regarded as innocent, even creditable, as during the classic times of mythology.

One peculiarity of Hebrew belief was, as we have seen, that it denounced such communications as unholy, even criminal. In the beginning, Christianity said that God only was to be sought in prayer.

About the opening of the Christian era we can trace outlines of the more modern witchcraft beliefs. As the twilight of the dark ages of Christianity came on and settled heavily, superstition spread. The early observations of nature in the East had seemed to show that two great powers were in command over the world, and continually warring. The two mighty antagonists used men as puppets and played with and upon them.

Even Christianity allowed that perhaps the devil was at the head, and that it was possible for persons to join him for the overthrow of the church.

In this belief lay the kernel of all subsequent action upon the crime of witchcraft.

Still later, things of strange import not classified before as necessarily bad, were increasingly attributed to an intimacy with the devil. After that, learned men, instead of concealing their discoveries, proclaimed them abroad and showed their naturalness and freedom from the uncanny. All this tended enormously to the spread of knowledge, and the dispersing of the mists of that twilight time.

Christian Thomasius, who died in 1728 and did his university work at Halle, wrote treatises and plunged constantly into great and living questions, in which he rendered more direct service to mankind than any other German from Luther to Lessing. First of these subjects was witchcraft, and his work finally destroyed this widespread, noxious, tenacious growth.

But witchcraft as a crime had been punished with wide carnage as early as the century when the Roman Empire became Christian.

All Christendom believed that some persons were possessed of supernatural powers, of advantage to themselves, and evil and confusion to their enemies. It was a capital crime by the laws of many European nations.

In the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon found out so much of optics, chemistry and astronomy that he was charged with witchcraft. Papal denunciation followed and he was twice imprisoned.

In 1305, Arnold de Villa Nova was burned by inquisitors at Padua, on the charge of witchcraft.

The Earl of Bedford put Joan of Arc to death on this charge.

Even Martin Luther actually believed that he talked with the devil.

In 1484 came the famous Bull of Pope Innocent VIII which gave new fury to the persecution of those possessing occult powers, and enormously hastened the unrelenting pursuit of witchcraft. Hundreds perished, not only Protestants, but some Roman Catholics as well, these horrible transactions often sanctioned by theological hatred and rancor. It was easy to clear the church of heretics by

hanging and burning, and quite as easy to accuse and condemn as witches in the first place.

The fury raged in both Protestant and Catholic countries. History reports that agents of the Pope burned over nine hundred.

During our colonial era six hundred a year perished in Germany, and a state of things almost as bad prevailed in Italy, Switzerland and Sweden.

In 1541, the Earl of Hungerford was beheaded for asking of a reputed witch how long Henry VIII might be expected to live.

One inquisitor, or so-called judge, Regius, condemned and burned over nine hundred in fifteen years, in Lorraine, and as many more fled the country, in desperate fear of their lives. He practiced the most awful tortures, remarking that otherwise he could not get them to confess. Most intelligent persons believed that witches communicated with Satan.

Most of the sufferers were innocent, but some were undoubtedly evil, and knew they had been imposing on the world. Still others had taught magic, and really believed they had covenanted with the devil.

In the sixteenth century, continental Europe sacrificed one hundred thousand lives in this mad fanaticism. In the sixteenth century one thousand perished in Como in Lombardy, one hundred a year, after.

The statute of Queen Elizabeth against witchcraft and sorcerers, in 1562 began practically the persecutions in England, which reached their height in the seventeenth century. King James I was the great persecutor, and the Act of Parliament in England in 1603 caused the fury to break out like wildfire. It was in the same year that parsons were forbidden to cast out devils in England without a license.

In a period more than covered by John Alden's life, forty thousand "witches" were murdered in England. For a hundred and twenty-five years a sermon was annually preached on a foundation of £40 confiscated in this same fateful year, 1603, as the property of three witches.

The English statutes against witchcraft were repealed only forty years before the American Colonies ceased to be a part of the British Empire. About 1615, more than five hundred were put to death in Geneva, the home of Calvin. During the reign of King James VI,

thousands of "witches" were executed in Scotland, and in 1645 a hundred in Essex and Sussex alone.

King James of Scotland was a firm believer in the occult. All mysteries found ready credulity in his mind, and to flatter his weakness Parliament passed truly terrible laws against witches. The worst tortures were practiced at this time, and in England as well—and were indulged in with a spirit of unmitigated cruelty and vindictiveness. Mercy and compassion seemed strangled in the hearts of the persecutors, as later they seemed also absent from the Salem judges.

A fiend in human shape went about, not only to extort confessions from innocent people, but to entrap and confuse everyone upon whom he could lay hands. His own name was Matthew Hopkins, his title "Witchfinder General." This monster operated in England in 1646, his expenses paid liberally to prick, cut, torture, drag in water, tie up and mutilate all suspects, and as I have said, to extort confessions which could be later used against them. In one year and one county he alone had sixty killed. People—and we are filled with amazement that such was the case—looked not only complacently, but with admiration upon him, believing that he had stolen Satan's list of confederates, his "book of names." Even good men like Richard Baxter and Edmund Calamy believed in him. But then, Baxter always believed in ghosts and other uncanny manifestations.

One of Hopkins' pet methods was to tie his victims' limbs together, double the body over and tie hands to feet and so forth, and then throw them into water. If they floated they were proved and convicted witches, and dealt with accordingly. If they sank they were innocent—but being by that time drowned it did not do them personally much good.

He was finally suspected of not acting in good faith, and some persons tied him into a bundle and threw him into the water. He floated.

Nobody, however, dared to deny the reality of witchcraft, though error never being absolutely universal, there were people who took no real share in these beliefs.

Thus it will be seen that Christianity did not stamp out certainties as to witches. Not a village in England but had its ghost; churchyards were haunted; every common had its "circle" of fairies, and hardly a shepherd lived but had seen spirits. The Rev. Joseph

Glanville, Vicar of Frome, Chaplain to Charles II, and a member of the Royal Society, wrote distinctly in favor of the undoubted existence of witches, witchcraft and apparitions. His books were certainly read in New England before we began to publish such literature here.

Spiders were always intimately associated with strange powers and incantations; and witches were supposed to be able, at will, to turn themselves into dogs, cats, hogs, rats, mice, toads—and into the yellow birds which flew adroitly to their victims.

We remember Holmes's famous picture of the "midnight hags" sailing off

"On their well-trained broomsticks mounted high,
Seen like shadows against the sky;
Crossing the track of owls and bats,
Hugging before them their coal-black cats."

How it brings the whole weird scene before us, as also his description of

"Dusky nooks in the Essex woods,
Dark, dim, Dante-like solitudes,
Where the tree-toad watches the sinuous snake
Glide through his forests of fern and brake."

Witches could operate from a distance, however, by means of their own "apparitions" even from a hundred miles away; so that an *alibi* could never be urged—as was tragically shown in Salem later on.

Enough has been said to show that the belief in witchcraft was neither confined to America nor indigenous to New England, but was legitimately imported by the first settlers.

In many important respects, Massachusetts was peculiarly ready for just the sort of delusion which descended upon it with such crushing force. Her people believed in the reality of these manifestations, in common with other Christian countries, although one of its most singular features to us, now, is the sort of people who firmly held to its reality—the burning belief of eminent, even godly men.

It should not be forgotten that their experience in a new and savage country had been sad and tragic rather than happy. Their homes must all have been tinged with melancholy, and "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" was a Bible command.

They felt that here in bleak New England they were especially called upon to defeat the devil. It is interesting to find that more

than seventy years after the last witch was executed in New England Sir William Blackstone wrote in all simplicity:

“To deny the possibility, nay, actual existence of witchcraft and sorcery is at once flatly to contradict the revealed word of God in various passages in both the Old and New Testament.”

A few sporadic cases of trial and execution for witchcraft occurred before 1650, but the strong feeling hardly began until about 1651. Altogether there were only four executions for that crime in Boston: Margaret Jones, June, 1648; Mary Parsons, 1651; Ann Hibbins, 1656; Goody Glover, 1688. The fever never raged with great violence in western Massachusetts, the region of Hampshire County particularly being then as now slow to stir in radical causes.

The first execution in New England for witchcraft, was in Connecticut in 1647. The “crime” probably showed itself first among the Springfield planters. In December, 1648, a certain Mary Johnson confessed to familiarity with Satan in Hartford and was executed. About 1651 John Eliot writes, supposedly to Edward Winslow in London, of four witches being detected in Springfield, one executed for the murder of her own child, another condemned, a third under trial, a fourth under suspicion.

The first case in Hampshire County was at Springfield (then in that county) in the spring of 1651.

The same Mary Parsons already alluded to as one of the four to perish in Boston, was accused not only of murdering her child, but of bewitching the two children of Rev. George Moxon. Subsequently it was shown that she was quite deranged, though too late to save her.

In 1656 a suit and trial for slander in Northampton, originating in neighborhood gossip, stirred the county to its depths. One Joseph Parsons, charged Goodwife Bridgman with slander, in accusing his wife Mary of witchcraft. Being persons of good position and property, the case was pushed with much energy, and resulted in a conviction for Goody Sarah Bridgman. Her family cherished the grudge for eighteen years, and in 1674 it flamed out again, using as a basis the general belief in personal dealing with the devil, by which they averred that Mary Parsons had murdered by witchcraft Mary Bridgman, married to Samuel Bartlett. It is consoling to find that the accused came off with flying colors.

During King Philip’s War in 1675, as the men marched to the

attack, an eclipse of the sun is said to have occurred in which they saw the outlines of an Indian scalp. While the accounts of mediæval eclipses are in a sense historic, no one would claim for them scientific fullness or precision. In these forgotten coronas almost any strange forms might have been imagined. Learned persons believed all these portents as wholly as the illiterate. It is not to be wondered at, then, that witchcraft was a capital offence in every civilized country.

The scanty literature of the time teems with weird tales, many of which would be ludicrous had they not led to such tragic endings. Certain depositions describing mysterious attacks are curiously humorous in themselves,—though humor was antipodal to the deluded people who gave them. Noah Strong in Northampton suspected a pigeon-hawk of sinister designs and motives, and he accordingly shot it, with his silver sleeve button, and broke its wing. At that moment a woman he had displeased had her arm broken. Any peculiar sickness or accident was almost invariably ascribed to witchcraft, and people began to look about for those through whom Satan would operate. They talked of “fascinations,” and tried to collect facts for “strange apparitions.”

Not much real excitement prevailed before 1680, nor were there many convictions in New England.

In 1684, Increase Mather wrote his famous book, “*Illustrious Providences*,” in which he told many stories of persons in league with the devil.

The most noteworthy witch in Hampshire County was Mary Webster of Hadley, a poor, and probably bad-tempered, woman. Many stories until comparatively recent years were still told in the vicinity—of her stopping cattle or horses from going by her house, tipping off loads of hay and putting them on again; while mysterious scalds and all sorts of malicious performances were ascribed to her as a result of her familiarity with the devil. Brought before the court in 1683, she was acquitted at Boston. She was afterward accused of bewitching Lieut. Philip Smith, so that he died peculiarly, with flashes of fire about his head and strange noises. During the time that his friends “disturbed” the old woman (as it was politely called), hanging her up, rolling her in the snow, temporarily burying her, and other pleasant exercises, he had much ease and comfort, and slept peacefully. In spite of this terrible treat-

ment the poor old woman lived, quietly enough, for eleven years longer.

One affair, as leading perhaps directly to the wild Salem horrors of 1692, must be mentioned.

A young girl named Goodwin in Boston had a quarrel with her Irish washerwoman about some missing linen. Probably the woman retaliated with Irish warmth. At all events the child had her revenge by "crying out" upon her as a witch. Such fun did this become, especially as persons listened and seemed to be impressed (several other children flocking to her standard crying that they, too, were bewitched), that the bad child went on in vehemence, and pretended to all sorts of afflictions, in which the other children joined. They mewed, barked, lost their hearing, sight, speech, their jaws would lock like a vise, or open until dislocated, they could read in Popish or Quaker books, but not in the Westminster Catechism or in the Bible.

It seems incredible that such performances could impose upon scholarly men, but Cotton Mather implicitly believed they were bewitched, and they actually had five ministers praying with them at one time. The washerwoman was requested to repeat the Lord's prayer as a proof of innocence. Never having learned it in English she made several bad, stumbling blunders, and was forthwith convicted and sent to the gallows. When she was actually hung, the children immediately recovered.

In 1691, Mary Randall in Springfield was complained of, though not prosecuted; and hers was the last case in Hampshire County.

But now was to begin in far-away Essex a wild, fanatical delusion which the world has hardly seen equalled—not in the number of victims, for they were only twenty, but a carnival of ferocious cruelty and suffering, which, from surrounding circumstances, attained a world-wide celebrity beyond even those similar periods in Europe where hundreds were slain.

But twelve had suffered death in New England before the craze at Salem in 1692, that "storm of terror and death." Curiously, twenty-five years before, some mischievous children in Sweden had played tricks very much like those performed by the young girls who started Salem fires, and eighty-eight in the cold Scandinavian peninsula had died in consequence. In Amsterdam, too, in 1560,

twenty or thirty boys pretended to be bewitched, and had strange fits, in which they threw up needles and pins and broken glass.

Ninety years before, or more, William Perkins of Cambridge (England) had written a book with the emphatic title, "Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft," and it has been shown that Rev. Mr. Parris, in whose house the Salem fires were kindled, had a copy at hand. He was perhaps a learned, but exceedingly disagreeable and unpopular man, and his subsequent conduct adds an element of execration to memories of him.

Spirits were said to have been seen already near Gloucester, and had been fired upon by people, but apparently never hit, and the marksmen retired to the garrison for safety. Everyone believed at that time that Satan was waging war upon Jehovah, and was operating extensively through persons who had pledged their souls to him. By their training, habits of mind, experience and character, the Salem people were well adapted for the events now rapidly approaching. The excitement began to work its way, and bringing in the supernatural so clearly, precipitated the final explosion.

The story of the Goodwin children, and of their relief when their "tormentor" was hung, had been told everywhere. Arrests had begun for trivial things, and in Mr. Parris's house the spiritual torch was applied.

A party of young girls and a West Indian slave, Tituba, servant in his family, had acquired a truly unholy curiosity about supernatural matters. Wildly interested in sorceries and magic, they met to practice rites and incantations they had read of, or heard from the old negress. They finally acquired the power to produce catalepsy, to cry real tears, or to perspire profusely at will, to fall in grotesque postures, and show cramps and spasms, until their families were at their wits' end, neighbors alarmed and distressed, and physicians baffled. Witchcraft, of course, was adduced as the cause of it all. Kinsfolk of these "afflicted children" as they were universally called, assembled for prayer. We can imagine the naughty satisfaction with which these highly accomplished young persons regarded the storm which they had evoked. More ministers were sent for, and a prayer-meeting lasting all day was held. The children (aged nine, eleven, twelve, two or three of seventeen and two of eighteen, with three married women) were made to perform for the awe-struck company.

So far we can see the absurdity—the bad taste and deception, if you will—but now the scene becomes criminal. They were asked what ailed them—who had bewitched them. So they “cried out upon” three names, and the unfortunate trio were at once taken into custody, arraigned in Salem meeting house, and sent to jail. Later on Martha Corey, Rebecca Nurse, and others were added until over one hundred were in jail. Their examinations, as we read them today, were farcical in the extreme. Questions were silly and ridiculous. The accused were not allowed to have lawyers, and must conduct their own defence. Their bewilderment at the charges was often pathetic to the last degree. Some of them did not know the “children” even by sight, but that made no difference. They were prejudged guilty before a word had been spoken. It was believed that witches could not cry, and their stupor of amazement at the charges was put down to an evil presence of mind, especially as the “children” often exclaimed in court that they saw the “black man” standing beside to counsel and comfort his puppets. It was believed that the witches made dolls and small figures which they called by the names of those they wished to torment, and then scalded them, stuck pins in them, or similar pleasantries, whereby at the identical moment the living victim would be scalded, pricked or pinched as the case might be. Their houses were often searched for these wicked toys, in solemn faith. Also their bodies were scrutinized for “witch marks” or callous spots, which old people often have. And the finding of such a spot was practically conviction.

The trials were extremely irregular, people speaking out as damaging thoughts occurred to them, whispering to the judges, and otherwise bringing obloquy upon the whole court, if any had been sufficiently unprejudiced to appreciate it.

Cotton Mather is said by the best historians to be largely the originator of these outrages; and he seems to have taken a leading part in the persecutions, with apparently great satisfaction and comfort in fomenting the excitement.

As for the “children,” they were manifestly intoxicated by their overwhelming success, the terrible perfection of their selfish scheme to become of wide importance, and were swept along in a sort of frenzy. Rigid and often cataleptic in court, they were instantaneously “cured” by a touch from the person they had accused of

bewitching them, the theory being that the evil fluid flowed back to its source, out of the girls to the witch.

It is singular that no one should have observed that the girls never accused their friends, but always those against whom they had some spite or animosity. They said an "evil hand" was against them. Whose was it?

As they had acquired supposable powers of divination they became very important, even exalted to the position of prophetesses, which spoiled them, and dried up all natural pity and compassion in their hearts, leaving only the burning intoxication of power and notoriety. It seems unbelievable now, but all writers about the period agree in this point, often reiterating that "the fun of the thing" led them on.

One of the most picturesque characters of that fatal year seems to have been Bridget Bishop. Entirely free from the sanctimoniousness which so disagreeably tinged even the best meaning persons in those days, she was too free and easy to be popular in the sober community. Her costumes were showy for the time and place, she played shovel board and other worldly games, and altogether was not quite approved of, even at the best of times. But there is no insinuation whatever against her moral character. It was natural, however, that she should have been speedily "cried out against" in such an era. She became a victim of gross misrepresentation. She was farcically tried, and hanged after eight days. Her death warrant is the only one preserved.

The accused protested their innocence, but to no avail. Every possible inducement was given them to confess, and many did, which although it led to their subsequent pardon, only added fuel to the fire of hatred toward those brave ones refusing to confess a lie.

Six women were hung during one day, eight on another. To the credit be it said of the unjust judges and the packed juries, that at least they never but once delivered over their victims to torture. That was in the case of the venerable Giles Corey, who refused to answer or plead, thereby saving his estate to will as he chose. To make him speak he was squeezed between great weights, and so killed, refusing to the last to say a word in his own defence. His tortures still make Essex County black.

At Andover a woman was ill in a peculiar way, not understood by the simple physicians of the day, so a Salem "witch detector" was

sent for, and fifty Andover people were accused, a few weaker ones confessing injuries to neighbors which they could not have committed, and acknowledging that they rode a variety of animals and sticks through the air at night.

“Mount and be quick,
A broom or a stick,
Goat, pitchfork—
We’re all in a flurry.
We’ll leave behind
The swiftest wind
As off to the Brocken we hurry.

We’ll madly bound,
While dancing around.
Great Beelzebub,
He is our master;
Sometimes we’ll pause,
Kiss his old claws,
Then faster we’ll caper and faster.”

By the latter part of 1692 twenty had been killed, all of whom had nobly refused to confess something they were not guilty of. Fifty had been pardoned because they did confess, one hundred and fifty were awaiting trial, two hundred had charges against them. There seemed but one way to avoid being “cried out upon” and that was to cry out first and accuse somebody. That generally brought immunity to the accuser. The community was practically insane on the subject, enveloped in a weird and consuming flame which all the blood of the innocent victims could not yet quench.

It was believed that locks would neither keep a witch out, nor in, unless doors were each double locked; and in general suspected witches were also manacled. The body could be watched, but the “apparition” might be off choking or strangling somebody to death, or otherwise working evil.

So far as remote and rustic communities were concerned, this was undoubtedly the most benighted period in our history. The education which had come over with the first settlers had largely disappeared when they died, and nothing had yet come in America to take its place. These proceedings against “witches” were instigated by all sorts of personal grudges and pique, and free rein was given to all maliciousness. Those “cried out upon” were not of the lower classes—rather the reverse.

Even Capt. John Alden, son of John of *Mayflower* fame, was accused, cried out upon and for fifteen weeks imprisoned. He was a leading and distinguished man, and for over thirty years a resident of Boston. He commanded the armed vessel belonging to the colony, a most efficient officer, and naval commander. He was seventy years old, and very wealthy. All this did not save him. But he was nearly four months in prison before he could be prevailed upon by friends to make his escape. "Outraged innocence will not save your life," they urged, and at length he broke out, and appeared before his amazed relatives in Duxbury, who sheltered him. When the craze subsided no charges of any definite character could be proved against him, and no accuser appeared, so all judicial proceedings ceased. But to the day of his death this doughty navigator could never hear a word about that experience without a high-flaming wrath that broke out into many nautical remarks not strictly appropriate to the drawing-room.

Children were induced by awful fear to give evidence against their parents; brothers against sisters; wives, husbands, dearest of friends—no ties were respected. Some replied to the outrageous charges in wrath, like Sarah Good, who answered back with much spirit, "You are a liar. I am no more a witch than you are a wizard; and if you take away my life, God will give you blood to drink."

You will remember that this is the fatal sentence which Hawthorne, that modern wizard, puts into the mouth of Maule, in "The House of Seven Gables." Charges were liable to be exceedingly frivolous, but that made no difference in the result. While some retaliated thus, in words, others bore the obloquy in gentle sweetness, like Elizabeth How.

Rebecca Nourse called forth more evidence in her favor than any of the others condemned. She was once acquitted, and there is reason to believe that Cotton Mather used his influence to have her re-tried. It is certain that had the verdict in her case rested with the people, she would have been triumphantly released. Thirty-nine leading citizens signed a petition for her, dangerous as such favorable words were to those who dared use them; but there was evidently an organized association of individuals to persecute and condemn suspects, and they followed her mercilessly, by a definite effort of the magistrates. Then a wave of furious fanaticism broke, with Parris pressing it on, and they not only murdered Rebecca

Nourse, but excommunicated her before her death. The hideous cruelty of that can be appreciated only by remembering that they thought they were forever shutting her out of heaven by it, as well as wrecking the earthly life of the noble, venerable woman, who for forty years had only done kindnesses to her community.

The persecution of Rev. George Burroughs was similarly and criminally absurd. He was, and had been, at Casco Bay when he was alleged to have committed his witchcraft spells, but he was sought out and imprisoned. He was a popular rival to Mr. Parris and must be removed. His chief sins, according to his accusers, were, that being a small man, he was still able to perform remarkable muscular feats. Cotton Mather was loud in denunciations of him.

But John Proctor saw through the true inwardness of much of this wild orgy, and spoke out freely—which cost him his own life. No one could breathe “conspiracy and delusion” safely in those days. He was so bold that it was necessary to get him out of the way. His splendid deportment in dying seems to have opened a few eyes, and to have been something of a blow to the delusion. But persons behind the scene urged on more horrors for purposes of their own.

Still the worst of it all was practically confined to Essex County. Then, at last, these “afflicted children” whom it is a wonder an avenging heaven did not fall upon or crush months before, grew over-confident. They had become so skilful in their diabolical arts as to deceive the elect, and they overestimated their temporary power, due to a frenzy of persecution bound, in the nature of things, to die out sometime. They cried out upon persons in very high stations, though from the beginning this had been dangerous.

The Rev. S. Willard, pastor of the Old South Church and subsequently Harvard’s president, was accused—for which the girls were rebuked by the court; then upon some members of Increase Mather’s family, because he was not so ardent in denunciations as his more violent son; then whispers began to be circulated about Lady Phips, the Governor’s wife, and a few persons called a halt in the carnage. When Mrs. Hall, wife of the minister at Beverly, was accused, the committee decided that they had probably perjured themselves, and so their power came to a sudden and unexpected end, and a close was put to one of the most terrible tragedies of

earth. The revulsion was enormous and rapid, hastened no doubt by several suits for slander and defamation of character. It is said that Andover recovered and gained its poise first.

Two years later, however, Harvard College issued "Proposals to the Reverend Ministers of the Gospel" for a collection of "apparitions, possessions and enchantments." But it was abortive. The fury had passed. People and juries repented in sorrow for their acts.

In 1696, January 14, Judge Sewall rose in his Old South pew, and handed a paper of humiliation and remorse to the pulpit, where it was read, the judge standing till it was finished. Every year he kept a private day of humiliation and prayer for his part in the tremendous wrong.

Thirteen years later Ann Putnam, one of the three wilful beginners of all the horrors, confessed her false part, and it is now on record in the books of the Danvers church.

Twenty years after, in 1710, the General Court made grants to the heirs of the sufferers, and annulled their convictions.

Seventy years later Governor Hutchinson scorns the whole affair publicly as fraud and imposture begun by irresponsible girls. And certainly personal spite had much to do with all the later accusations.

It is certain that depositions of an incriminating character to the accused were taken and surreptitiously added to the papers in the case many years after their murder, to bolster up the case for the shamefaced judges and instigators.

But beliefs were not all changed thus in the twinkling of an eye, even if conscience did awake at the enormities committed. As late as 1712, South Carolina adopted the act of King James I, "against conjuration, witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits;" and Rhode Island still later, in 1728, called such affairs felony, and ordered persons convicted to be killed.

Mankind is prone to sudden and inexplicable furies, for we remember that in 1741 a story became rife in New York that the blacks had conspired to murder all the whites. The result of this was eleven negroes burned at the stake, eighteen hung, and fifty sent South into slavery. It was a panic not dissimilar to the witch-fever, and as fatal to its victims.

It is humiliating to reflect upon, and makes the cheek burn even now. There were sweet-natured, godly men in 1692, but the stern-

ness of religion generally was but slightly mitigated by tenderness, and in its name horrors and atrocities were committed all the more ghastly because supposedly perpetrated in the name of an accusing God.

Perhaps imagination, denied its legitimate outlet in music, painting and love of the beautiful, vented itself in these orgies; even dissipation in novel reading might not be indulged, and so an abnormal and repressed imagination, distorted, twisted, almost unrecognizable, found illegitimate food in these unspeakable horrors.

I never see the splendid sunsets burning behind Witch Hill in Salem without a quicker breathing—the tribute of a sigh, mental at least, to its ghastly memories. And yet it is more profitable in recalling this shameful outbreak, to remember what superb qualities it unveiled in the patient victims—how steadfastly they clung to their fatal statement of innocence—how clearly burned their steady spirit, despite all the wild surrounding hurricane. This is better than to dwell on the cruelty and wickedness, the blindness and fanaticism of their accusers and judges.

Emily Dickinson says:

“I had no time to hate, because
The grave would hinder me;
And life was not so ample
I could finish enmity.”

And so we must leave them to their repose. After two hundred years the grass grows with equal luxuriance over accusers and accused, over judge and prisoner, over persecutor and victim; the splendid nightly firmament still arches its silent but pregnant immensity above the same earth which saw that long-gone tragedy.

Nature may be pitiless, and mankind may reek of cruelty and injustice, but

“Still the pensive spring returns,
And still the punctual snow;”

and through all its mistakes and crimes we cannot but know that humanity is making its way, though by slow and halting stages, to its great, its superb birthright, to take up its heritage of the ages as a part of the joy and strength of the Creator, “a spark of the gladness of God” which shall yet become the illumination of the world.